

## Tetanus and Diphtheria (Td) Vaccine

Immunization has saved more lives in Canada in the last 50 years than any other health measure.

### What is the Td vaccine?

The Td vaccine protects against two diseases:

- Tetanus
- Diphtheria

The vaccine is approved by Health Canada and is provided free. Call your public health nurse or doctor to make an appointment.

In early childhood, immunization for tetanus and diphtheria is usually combined with other vaccines such as pertussis (whooping cough) and polio. These are given as a series of doses or shots. Most children receive these when infants and toddlers and get a booster dose at school entry and in grade 9. For more information, see BC HealthFiles [#15a Diphtheria, Tetanus, Pertussis, Polio \(DTaP-IPV\) Vaccine](#), [#15b Diphtheria, Tetanus, Pertussis, Polio, \*Haemophilus influenzae\* Type b \(DTaP-IPV-Hib\) Vaccine](#), and [#18c Tetanus, Diphtheria, Pertussis \(Tdap\) Vaccine](#).

### Who should get the Td vaccine?

The vaccine can be given to persons 7 years of age and older.

Adults should get Td vaccine every 10 years if they received a series earlier in life. This booster dose strengthens or boosts the immune system to give better protection against tetanus and diphtheria.

The vaccine can also be given as a three-dose series to adults who have not been immunized or do not have a record of prior immunization. In addition, the vaccine may be given to people with serious cuts or deep wounds whose last tetanus vaccine was given some years ago.

It is important to keep a record of all immunizations received.

### Benefits of Td Vaccine

The Td vaccine is the best way to have ongoing protection against tetanus and diphtheria, which are serious and sometimes fatal diseases.

When you get vaccinated, you help protect others as well.

### Possible Reactions after the Vaccine

Vaccines are very safe. It is much safer to get the vaccine than to get tetanus or diphtheria.

Common reactions to the vaccine may include soreness, swelling or redness where the shot was given. This is more likely to occur if the person has received the vaccine more often than recommended.

Acetaminophen or Tylenol<sup>®</sup> can be given for fever or soreness. ASA or Aspirin<sup>®</sup> should NOT be given to anyone under 20 years of age due to the risk of Reye Syndrome.

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine because there is an extremely rare possibility of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This may include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. If this happens after you leave the clinic, call 911 or the local emergency number. This reaction can be treated, and occurs in less than one in a million people who get the vaccine.

**Report serious or unexpected reactions to your public health nurse or doctor.**

### Who should not get the Td vaccine?

Speak with a public health nurse or doctor if you have had a life-threatening reaction to a previous dose of tetanus or diphtheria vaccine, or any component of the vaccine.

People who developed Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) within 8 weeks of getting tetanus vaccine should not get the Td vaccine. GBS is a rare condition that can result in weakness and paralysis of the body's muscles.

### What are Tetanus and Diphtheria?

**Tetanus**, also called “lockjaw”, is caused by a germ (bacteria) mostly found in the soil. When the bacteria enter the skin through a cut or scrape, they produce a poison that can cause painful tightening of muscles all over the body. It is very serious if the breathing muscles are affected. Up to 2 in 10 people who get tetanus will die.

**Diphtheria** is a serious infection of the nose and throat. About 1 in 10 people who get diphtheria will die. The germ (bacteria) is spread through the air by persons sneezing or coughing and by direct skin-to-skin contact. The disease can result in very

severe breathing problems. It can also cause heart failure and paralysis.

These diseases are now rare in BC because of routine childhood vaccination programs.

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Call the BC NurseLine to speak to a registered nurse, available 24-hours every day:

- In Greater Vancouver, call 604-215-4700
- In BC, call toll-free 1-866-215-4700
- Deaf and hearing-impaired, call 1-866-889-4700
- Pharmacist available 5pm to 9am every day
- Translation services in over 130 languages upon request.

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